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ABSTRACT

Research shows that a very large percentage of Japanese university students are apprehensive about communicating orally, to the degree that their fear may be debilitating, weakening their effectiveness as oral interactants in social and classroom situations. This uneasiness with speech has been culturally ingrained for centuries. Children are trained to be silent, and much of Japanese society reinforces that training. Although speaking is the primary means of communication, many students' apprehension overrides their desire to learn to speak well in a second language, and they tend to avoid classroom speaking situations. The emphasis on reading and writing drills in second language instruction and the instructor's own apprehension only add to the students' poor language acquisition. Second language instruction should place greater emphasis on oral communication by arranging, in the classroom, social situations where students can practice spontaneous and effective speaking. These situations may progress from simple dyadic encounters to more complex group and public speaking encounters. Simple muscle relaxation exercises at the beginning of the class period may also help to put the apprehensive student more at ease with speaking. (HTH)

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# INCREASING INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS: REDUCING CLASSROOM APPREHENSION

by Satoshi Ishii and Donald Klopf*

[Prepared for the Japan Association of Language Teachers International Conference on Language Teaching/Learning, November 22-24, 1980, Nagoya, Japan.]

## Abstract

Research shows that a very large percentage of Japanese university students are apprehensive about communicating orally to the degree that their fear is said to be debilitating, weakening their effectiveness as oral interactants in classroom situations.

Second language instruction should place a heavy emphasis on oral communication since speaking is the primary means of communicating. Students should be trained in the effective use of spoken language. However, for many students, their apprehensive behavior overrides their desire to learn to speak well in the second language and they avoid classroom speaking situations. Often, the instructor places more attention on reading and writing the language than the oral aspects, perhaps because of student reluctance and his own.

This paper examines oral apprehension among Japanese college students, its negative impact on learning, indicating the effects on classroom success, and finally, methods for reducing apprehension to increase language learning.

## Introduction

Our research on oral communication apprehension among the Japanese[1] has led us to conclude that apprehension about communicating orally is high in Japan with the typical Japanese being characterized as "shy, self-conscious, and embarrassed when communicating with others, especially strangers."[2] Moreover, about 35 percent of Japanese college students perceive themselves to be so fearful of speaking that their fear is debilitating, weakening their effectiveness as oral interactants in classroom speaking situations.[3] Significantly, almost all of the Japanese students participating in this reasearch, approximately five thousand, were studying English as a second language. A large proportion of the Japanese students studying English (54 percent) were enrolled in English classes because they thought "English would be necessary in the future and they want to be able to talk with foreigners."[4]

If these students hope to communicate with English-speaking foreigners in later years, they can expect that most of their communication is going

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to be oral, in other words, very likely they will be speaking with the foreigners. Speech is the principal modality of communication and educators who teach English should be concerned with helping students learn the language and achieve some degree of speaking competence. The term "speaking competence" is used to mean a person's knowledge of how to use language appropriately in all kinds of communication situations.

The Japanese students of English, unfortunately, are poor English speakers and writers, and fare unsatisfactorily in oral encounters, even though many have had more than an average amount of second language instruction.

Numerous reasons have been advanced for the inadequate results. One authority blames both the English curriculum with its heavy emphasis on English literature and the instructors, many of whom speak and write as poorly as their students.[5]

Another reason advanced for the English incompetency of Japan's students is the reliance on tightly controlled drills and exercises--manipulative classroom activities, that is to say, activities in which the students listen to the teacher, or, worse, tape recordings, and then parrot the words or sentences the students hear, a practice denounced as inferior language instruction fifteen years ago.[6]

We suggest that apprehension about oral communication may be another reason why the typical Japanese college student studying English does not learn to speak it well, not only the student's apprehension but the instructor's as well. Apprehension is the reason why a good sized number of American students do not function effectively in the classroom.[7] Perhaps it is also a cause for the Japanese's inability to speak English.

In this paper we define oral apprehension, explain its impact on learning, and suggest methods for reducing apprehension in the classroom.

## Oral Apprehension

Communication apprehension is a person's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated talk with one or more persons. Those who have a high degree of apprehension experience fear or anxiety in almost every communication encounter or expected encounter. Not only do they suffer the common "stage fright" the average person feels when giving a speech to an audience, they are almost always fearful or anxious in all speaking situations including the public speaking situation. Their fear or anxiety surpasses any rewards they think they will get by talking, thus, they either do not speak at all or avoid speaking unless obligated to do so. When forced to speak, they appear to others as shy, non-assertive, nervous, embarrassed, uncomfortable, and reticent. They respond negatively to any oral communication situation, real or anticipated, public or private, involving any number of people in small or large groups.[8]

According to McCroskey's summary of the research, people who experience a high degree of apprehension will withdraw from and seek to avoid communicating when possible. Because they withdraw from or avoid communicating,

they are not positively perceived and this negative perception affects their economic, academic, political and social lives.[9]

## Academic Implications

In the academic area, the principal concern here, the research reveals characterizing behavior of the highly apprehensive. In school, the highly apprehensive tend to drop speech classes early in the semester, if they enroll at all. They prefer large lecture classes over those small classes which encourage extensive student participation. In the large classes, they choose seats in the back or on the classroom's periphery. The seats front and center are more accessible to the teacher and students in those seats are more likely to be called upon. Should a class offer tutoring help or advising of any sort, the highly apprehensive are not likely to seek it. Because they avoid talking, their fellow students ignore them, having learned to do so from trying to draw them into class discussions. When the highly apprehensive do participate, their comments often are irrelevant to the on-going discussion or their verbalizations differ from the others. They are low producers of original ideas in group discussion.

More devasting than their speech behavior is the feelings the others in the classroom have of them, others being both students and teacher. The other students perceive them as non-assertive, risk-avoiders, cooperative, nondirective, "go-along" persons, uncommunicative, hard-to-know and cool. The highly apprehensive also are seen as less socially attractive, less sexually attractive, less sociable, less competent, less task attractive and less composed than the other students. They are rarely turned to for opinion leadership.

Teachers expect the highly apprehensive to have a lower overall academic achievement, less satisfactory relationships with others, and lower probability of success in future education than their less apprehensive peers. Prospective employers, paranthetically, react similarily to those perceived as highly apprehensive, even though their credentials compare favorably to low apprehensives.

Within the academic environment, the results of the negativism toward the high apprehensives have been established. The high apprehensives have lower overall college grade-point averages, lower grades in small classes and lower achievement on standardized tests than the less apprehensive in spite of their intelligence level which in many cases is high. Also, they develop a dislike for school early and dropout readily.[10]

The support seems overwhelming; the highly apprehensive are negatively impacted in their academic life. As the research indicates, their economic, political, and social life is likewise negatively affected, although these areas are not the concern here.

## Incidence in Japan

What is a concern here is the extent of apprehension in Japan. To find out what the extent is, we administered the Personal Report

of Communication Apprehension for College Students (PRCA)[11] to students groups in Nihon, Keio, Otsuma Women's, Waseda, and Yokohama City universities at different times over the past five years, the complete results of which are reported elsewhere.[12]

The PRCA is a self-report measure of speaking apprehension. It consists of twenty items dealing with one's perceptions about talking to others in the dyadic, small group and public speaking situations. The responses are given on a Likert-type, five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A person scoring 70 or higher, based on the norms for this measure, is considered highly apprehensive while someone scoring 80 or above is severely apprehensive. On the other hand, a person scoring below 60 is seen as a low apprehensive and, should the score be very low, not apprehensive at all.[13] The measure correlates highly with similar instruments and its reliability and validity seem well establish.

The results show that 35 percent of the population scored 70 or higher on the PRCA with 66 percent scoring 60 or higher. The results suggest that the level of apprehension among Japanese college students is high. These results are all the more startling when they are compared to those of students in America, Australia, Korea, Micronesia, Philippines, and the People's Republic of China. In every case, the Japanese results reflect a higher incidence of apprehension. We can generalize from these studies that the Japanese are more apprehensive about speaking than any other ethnic group in the Pacific basin area.

The literature supports the notion that communication apprehension should be common among the Japanese people. For example, Ueda notes that the Japanese people traditionally do not enjoy conversation or dialogue with other people. She thinks that the "attitudes of holding back one's ideas and feelings before others was so deeply implanted in the Japanese during the feudalistic reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate that it continued to a decade or so ago."[14] Nishiyama concurs with Ueda's analysis. Verbal aggressiveness is not a Japanese virtue, he claims, as children are trained from early childhood not to talk too much. They learn not to speak during meals, to strangers, and in public unless it is absolutely necessary to do so.[15] Naruke's assessment is stronger than that of Ueda and Nishiyama. The Japanese suffer from the phobia of meeting other people, he contends, and experience embarrassment in communicating with each other.[16] Nakane believes that the Japanese culture hinders oral interaction and, as a whole, the Japanese are not sociable.[17]

## Apprehension Learned

What causes communication apprehension? While all of the causes are not fully known, it is clear that communication apprehension is not hereditary. Highly apprehensive parents do not necessarily produce highly apprehensive children. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that communication apprehension is learned by the individual, usually during the early childhood years. When the child is positively reinforced for speaking, it appears unlikely that the child will become highly apprehensive. With positive reinforcement, the child learns to value speech both as a tool

and as intrinsically desirable experience.

The child who is not reinforced for speaking, or is punished, fails to develop the normal appreciation for oral communication. The child does not find intrinsic reward in communication itself, nor learns the instrumental functions of communication. For such a child, communication is not a tool. Rather communicating results in negative experiences. Such a child is very likely to develop a high level of communication apprehension.

While the nature of reinforcement during early childhood is the principle causative factor which leads to or prevents the development of communication apprehension, it is not the only possible cause. A traumatic experience can alter the normal speech pattern of a child and lead to the development of high apprehension. The loss of a parent, brother, or sister, particularly through violence, can severely disturb a child. A result of such a disturbance could be the development of high communication apprehension.

Usually high communication apprehension develops in preschool years or does not develop at all. However, there are instances where it develops later, or develops early but is eliminated during early school years. Each of these effects can be attributed to the impact of the school environment--teachers and peers. For the child who has experienced negative reinforcement in the pre-school years and enters a school as a high communication apprehensive, extensive positive reinforcement from teachers and later from peer can help overcome the problem. However, such positive reinforcement is not always provided. Similarly, a child may enter school as a moderate communication apprehensive but negative reinforcement from teachers and peers may cause the level of communication apprehension to increase. Neither of these effects will occur quickly, and the change in the child may be hardly noticeable, even to a trained observer. Patterns which have developed over several years prior to entering school are seldom reversed in a single year.[18]

Fensterheim and Baer sum up the causes in these remarks:

> Parents, teachers, clergymer, and businessmen have unwittingly conspired to produce a nation of timid souls. In early years, many mothers and fathers censor the child who decides to speak up for his rights and thus, hinder the child's assertion of self. Teachers reward the student who does not question the educational system and deal sternly with those who buck it. In most cases the church fosters the idea of humility and sacrifice rather than standing up for self. Many an employee learns early in his career that if he "speaks up," he is not likely to receive a raise or promotion and may even lose his job. Adopted at the office, this attitude carries over to home and social life.[19]

Children are trained to be silent and much of society reinforces that training.

Much of the above is based on Western cultural approaches to speech. In Japan the situation is probably more complex because Japanese children

learn a different set of values than those in the West. As Yoshikawa explains, there are many differences between the values the Japanese and Westerners have about speech. Five of these distinctions demand attention since they may account for the apparently high apprehension level among the Japanese. An explanation of the five follows.

1. A group versus individualistic orientation. The Japanese value harmony and will avoid opposing anyone directly. They are other-directed, in other words. Since the Japanese ordinarily encounter different people in different communication situations, to be other-directed and harmonious in each new situation, they may have to alter their ideas from situation to situation to conform to the ideas of the different people they meet. Talk then tends to be situational.

Westerners, on the other hand, are individualistically-oriented. They value openness, frankness, and a healthy confrontation of ideas regardless of the situation or the people they meet even though they may create disharmony and lose the support of others. Their individualness and independence is diametrically opposed to the Japanese's group-centeredness and need for harmony.

2. Aesthetic versus cognitive style of communicating. To the Japanese, the communicator's feelings or attitudes are crucial (the aesthetic style). To the Westerner, the exchange of ideas or messages is foremost (the cognitive style). For the Japanese, it's a minimum of verbal messages and a maximum of nonverbal; for the Westerner, it's a minimum of nonverbal and a maximum of verbal. The Japanese "read" feelings; the Westerner listen to words.

3. Persuasive versus non-persuasive talk. The Japanese consider it poor policy to use language to persuade or to establish mutual understanding; Westerners consider it good policy. Thus the Japanese try to make themselves understood by not talking, the Westerner by talking.

4. Total understanding versus no understanding. When a Japanese says there's no use in talking further, he means he cannot accept not only his fellow communicators ideas, attitudes, and/or feelings but the other fellow as a total person. For the Japanese, it's total understanding or no understanding at all; it's an emotional oneness with the total personality of the other. Westerners are not like that. They take a piece-meal approach realizing that it is not possible to understand the other totally. Feelings or attitudes, thoughts or ideas, actions or performances are evaluated separately. Westerners, thus, are more flexible and cooperative in oral interaction.

5. Direct versus non-directive talk. The Japanese are apt to be indirect in their communication, using intermediary symbols or persons to get their feelings or ideas across, while Westerners are up-front and direct.[20]

The managing director of Japan's Nomura Research Institute looks at the issue from another perspective as he explains the reluctance to

verbalize in these words:

> Historically, Japan's culture was agrarian while Western Europe's culture was based on hunting and cattle-raising. Frequently forced to fight for food, Europeans subsequently sought 'principles and rhetoric with which to persuade their opponents.' The Japanese, on the other hand, were more likely to face forces over which they had no control (such as typhoons), and, therefore, learned adaptability.
>
> Unlike most countries, Japan has only one ethnic group, one language and one culture, a situation that has created 'strong group solidarity.' The strong bond has enabled Japanese to communicate with out 'heavy reliance on verbal expressions' and logic and rhetoric, in sharp contrast to Americans and other Westerners.
>
> Establishing rapport is vital among the Japanese--far more important, in fact, than explaining the logic of a situation. That offers some explanation for the Japanese reluctance to speak up.[21]

## Reducing Apprehension

Prator, among others, advocates an emphasis on helping students who are learning English as a second language to reach a level of communication competency, to be able to speak in English. According to him, the acquisition of communication competence in a second language is best achieved by moving away from a complete reliance upon tightly controlled drills and exercises to more communication activities. Because true communication implies the absence of external controls, he recommends that the teaching of a second language should be so arranged as to constitute a gradual progression from manipulation to communication. Prator defines manipulative classroom activities as those in which the student listens to the teacher and repeats the appropriate words or sentences. With more communicative activities, he notes, the student is allowed greater control in determining how the language will be used. An example of this kind of activity would be a <u>spontaneous</u> conversation among students in the class, spontaneity being the key not the sort of conversational drill common to English language texts extensively used in Japan. This movement from manipulation to communication may be regarded as a gradual shift to greater <u>decontrol</u> of language usage.

Prator divides classroom activities into four major categories and places them on a scale. At one end are the activities completely manipulative in form, followed by those that are predominately manipulative, on to those that are moderately communicative, and finally those that are completely communicative. He recommends that teachers develop exercises that move students toward the communicative end of the scale as quickly as possible. In addition, he recommends that this shift from one end of the scale to the other be taught at every level of activity, and not be limited to advanced students. Thus, according to Prator, communication

activities can be introduced into the classroom almost immediately.[22]

Speech communication educators use the term "communication competence" to refer to a person's knowledge of how to use language appropriately in all kinds of communication situations. Whereas linguists are more frequently concerned with a person's knowledge of the grammatical structures of a language, communication educators make judgments about the "appropriateness" of an utterance. Thus, when speech communication teachers work to develop a student's communication competence, they most generally are concerned with helping them (1) enlarge their repetoire of communication acts, (2) select criteria for making the most appropriate choices from their repetoire, (3) implement the communication acts chosen, and (4) evaluate the effectiveness of the communication employed in terms of its appropriateness and its interpersonal effectiveness.

The term "communication functions" is used to refer to sets of communication acts which are basically similar to each other in overall communication purpose. Scholars have identified five basic communication functions that are involved in both the sending and receiving of messages. The five sets of communication functions are as follows:

1. Controlling. These are communication acts in which the participants' dominant function is to control behavior: for example, commanding, offering, suggesting, permitting, threatening, warning, prohibiting, contracting, refusing, bargaining, rejecting, acknowledging, justifying, persuading, and arguing.

2. Feeling. These are communication acts which express and respond to feelings and attitudes, such as exclaiming, expressing a state or an attitude, taunting, commiserating, tale-telling, blaming, disagreeing, and rejecting.

3. Informing. These are communication acts in which the participants' function is to offer or seek information: for example, stating information, questioning, answering, justifying, naming, pointing out an object, demonstrating, explaining, and acknowledging.

4. Ritualizing. These are communication acts which serve primarily to maintain social relationships and to facilitate social interaction, such as, greeting, taking leave, participating in culturally appropriate speech modes (for example, teasing, shocking, punning, praying, playing the dozens), and demonstrating culturally appropriate amenities.

5. Imagining. These are communication acts which cast the participants in imaginary situations and include creative behaviors such as role playing, fantasizing, speculating, dramatizing, theorizing, and storytelling.[23]

To institute Prator's suggestions for teaching English as a second language and to teach the sort of communicative behaviors championed by the speech educators sounds simple enough but can these goals be practically achieved? Even if the problems of resistance to changing instructional methodologies could be overcome, we would confront the problem of apprehension

and the reticence of student and teacher alike.

Help can be provided at least for dealing with apprehension and what follows is a listing of the more successful attempts at reducing classroom fear.

Recognizing the negative consequences of high communication apprehension, American communication scholars have experimented with ways of reducing it, although most ways have yet to receive sufficient empirical validation for widespread use. Among these are hypnosis,[24] relaxation induced by biofeedback,[25] group counseling,[26] reality therapy and assertion training,[27] false heartrate feedback[28] and conditioned relaxation.[29]

Three extensively studied methods have been found highly effective and are practised in American schools. These are systematic desensitization and two specially designed speech courses.

Systematic desensitization, a self-instructional program occurring in a laboratory setting, helps the highly apprehensive learn to cope through a series of relaxation and desensitization exercises[30]. The student visualizes her/himself in speaking situations, then utilizes muscle relaxation to counteract anxiety responses to the situations. Highly successful, its positive impact has been proved not only through student self-reports but in actual speaking as well.[31]

Researchers at Pennsylvania State University in the United States found communication apprehension so prevalent among students that a special program was developed, a program serving as a model for similar ones at other schools. Students enrolling in the required oral communication course are screened for communication apprehension. Those with high communication apprehension are placed in special sections of the course, grouped according to their specific difficulties. Small in number of students enrolled, the sections allow optimum oral interaction, emphasizing instruction and practice of situation-specific strategies from the simplest (e.g., opening a conversation) to the more complex (e.g., giving a public speech). Not only are the immediate effects of the training positive.[32] but the residual effects are high.[33]

Because communication apprehension's prevalence is greater at the University of Hawaii than at other major universities, the Hawaii program combines a modified form of the desensitization laboratory with communication apprehension reduction in the University's introductory speech course. The laboratory includes not only the desensitization exercises noted above but also role playing in simple oral situations.[34] The course is structured to allow the maximum communication apprehension reduction possible without hindering the other course goals. Essentially, the students orally interact first in simple dyadic encounters, then progress to small group interactions. Several public speaking assignments complete the semester-long course. Significant changes in the degree of communication apprehension have been consistently recorded through this program.

Interestingly, a Japanese publishing company has a book on the market,

Improving English Through Choral Speaking[35], which outlines a speech program for learning English using group speaking. The program accounts for student apprehension in several ways. Each day's lesson begins with a series of relaxation exercises. The two which follow show the simplicity of these exercises:

1. Sit comfortably in your seat, feet flat on the floor, back against the chair. Close your eyes. Take a few moments to sense your body and how it relates to the chair and floor. Become aware of your breathing. After thirty seconds, exhale through your nose; blow all the air out with a final puff or two. Let your shoulders slump forward as you exhale. Now inhale through your mouth with an audible sound, filling up every corner of your lungs, and slowly pulling your shoulders up. Continue breathing in this fashion for several minutes, alternating exhaling and inhaling every fifteen-twenty seconds.

Tense the muscles of your toes in the right leg as hard as you can. After a second or two, relax the toes. Then wiggle them for ten-fifteen seconds. Move this dance to your left foot, tensing the muscles, then relaxing them and wiggling them. Repeat with the calf and follow with the thigh. Now move to the right leg and follow the same procedure. Finally shake each entire leg, causing it to vibrate vigorously from hip to toe. Slowing let the shaking subside.

Follow the identical routine with the hands and arms. Tense the fingers in the right hand, then let them fall limp. Repeat. Next tense the arm muscles, and relax. Do the same with the left hand and arm. Finally, shake each arm vigorously, letting the shaking slowly subside.

Repeat this routine with the back muscles, facial muscles, eye muscles, and shoulder muscles.

After you have tensed and relaxed all of the muscles, return to the breathing pattern you began this exercise. This time as you exhale, go limp; feel relaxed.

2. Imagine that you are a doll, a stiff, ordinary doll. Tense your body like that of the stiff doll. Now imagine you are a rag doll, limp and floppy, as you quietly and calmly recite this verse:

| | |
|---|---|
| I'm a limp rag doll, | [Let your body go limp.] |
| I have no bones, | |
| My arms are limp, | [Swing arms loosely.] |
| My legs are limp, | [Swing legs loosely.] |
| My neck is limp, | [Let your neck flop around.] |
| I'm a limp rag doll.[36] | |

The book's author, Valentine Larson, points out that relaxation is important in reducing apprehension and in most performance activities, especially those involving speech. The entire body as well as the speech mechanism should be relaxed, she writes, if the speech activity is to be a pleasant and effective one. Both teacher and students need to relax but there will be little need for relaxation exercises, if the atmosphere of the classroom is informal, unhurried, relaxed and if the students are enjoying the speaking. However, only rarely is such an informal classroom atmosphere generated. Therefore, a few relaxation exercises are helpful at the start of the English learning session.[37]

The program moves the students through stages, the first of which has the whole class reading aloud together. After a few sessions of that, the students are assigned to groups of ten to read aloud before the rest of the class, then groups of five, and finally to pairs, hopefully, increasing their confidence as they do so. The students first read selections which stress certain English sounds hard to pronounce for the Japanese and those requiring improvement. Then the selections selected are those emphasizing certain rhythm patterns, samples of which are included in the book.

This program, of course, is designed for improving oral English and its usefulness, is therefore limited but it does show how English can be taught through the use of a speech activity and taught in such a manner as to lessen student apprehension.

## Summary

A large percentage of Japanese college students are apprehensive about communicating orally. Yet the latest techniques for teaching English as a second language stress oral activities. To reduce the apprehensiveness and increase confidence a series of methods were suggested. These range from hypnosis, to systematic desensitization, to simple relaxation exercises.

## FOOTNOTES

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